

Spain puts temporary ban on Worldcoin eyeballs scans, citing concerns over privacy

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Daniel Kertusha, 21, has his eyes scanned by an orb at a Worldcoin registration point in Barcelona, Spain, Friday, Aug. 4, 2023. Spain's privacy watchdog has ordered for Worldcoin to cease its operations for three months amid concerns over what it is doing with users' personal information. Worldcoin was created by OpenAI CEO Sam Altman. It scans eyeballs to make digital IDs in exchange for cryptocurrency. Credit: AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti, File

Spain's privacy watchdog has ordered for Worldcoin, the company created by OpenAI CEO Sam Altman that scans eyeballs to make digital IDs in exchange for crypto, to cease its operations in the country for three months amid concerns over what it is doing with users' personal information.

The stated goal of Worldcoin is to give people a form of identification that could never be stolen or duplicated. It says the way it can do this is by creating a "World ID" by scanning someone's eyeballs through "orbs"—a device that captures an image of their irises, the colored parts of the eyes.

In exchange, people who sign up get Worldcoin cryptocurrency.

Spain's Agency for Data Protection told Worldcoin's parent company Tools for Humanity Corporation on Wednesday to stop collecting [personal data](#) and keep hold of all information already collected.

The agency said in a statement that it had received various complaints against the company that range from gathering the personal information of minors to not allowing for people to withdraw their consent to sharing personal data.

People have lined up at points where these orbs are placed in cities like Madrid and Barcelona in recent months. More than 360,000 people in Spain have signed up for Worldcoin, according to the most recent company data from November.

While Worldcoin argues that the data is used to create a unique, secure form of identification, privacy experts have concerns that the company may use the information in other ways, like personalized marketing.



An orb, a spherical iris scanning device used by Worldcoin, is shown at a co-working office in Santa Monica, Calif., on Thursday, Aug. 3, 2023. Spain's privacy watchdog has ordered for Worldcoin to cease its operations for three months amid concerns over what it is doing with users' personal information. Worldcoin was created by OpenAI CEO Sam Altman. It scans eyeballs to make digital IDs in exchange for cryptocurrency. Credit: AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes, File

That has led other countries to investigate Worldcoin's operations, including France and Germany.

The Kenyan government has likewise suspended new sign-ups for Worldcoin as it investigates whether people's information is being properly protected.

Worldcoin responded that their operations preserve privacy.

"The Spanish [data protection](#) authority (AEPD) is circumventing EU law with their actions today, which are limited to Spain and not the broader EU, and spreading inaccurate and misleading claims about our technology globally," Jannick Preiwisch, Worldcoin's data protection officer, said in a statement.

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